

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 080

EA 018 265

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TITLE The Self-Reported Impact of Needs Assessment Studies.
SPONS AGENCY Vermont Univ., Burlington. Graduate Coll.
PUB DATE 21 Oct 85
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Society for Educational Planning (Kansas City, MO, October 20-22, 1985).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Attitudes; *Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; Influences; *Needs Assessment; Performance Factors; Principals; Surveys; Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A six-state survey conducted during the 1984-85 school year revealed that though school personnel feel that the actual impact of needs assessment studies on school improvement in general matches fairly well with the potential impact of such studies, these personnel also feel that the impact of needs assessment studies on specific categories of improvements lags behind the potential impact. One principal and two teachers completed the survey instruments in each of the 40 schools or districts responding. The specific areas in which the impact of needs assessment studies on improvement was examined were instructional and noninstructional activities, the curriculum, school goals, school problems, and school policies. The survey findings also indicated that the top performing schools reported greater overall performance in nearly all categories. Teachers and principals agreed on the degree of impact in most categories. The type of needs assessment approach used by the schools appeared to have only minor impact on the degree of performance. Charts presenting the findings graphically are included. (PGD)

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Paper Presentation at the International Society for Educational Planning Fall Conference, Kansas City, Missouri, October 21, 1985.

Title: The Self Reported Impact of Needs Assessment Studies

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Introduction:

This paper reflects the results of a six state survey of schools that had conducted a system or school wide needs assessment study within the last two to five years. The survey was designed to determine the degree to which the needs assessment study and related efforts had impacted instructional/noninstructional activities, curriculum, school goals, school problems, and school policies. For purposes of this study, a needs assessment was defined as a systematic process for gathering building level performance data and information and for initiating a subsequent improvement process.

During the 1984-85 school year, 150 local school districts or school buildings were surveyed to determine the results of a local effort at school improvement. These schools had been recommended by state departments of education or planning consultants. Forty schools (27%) responded to the survey. The principal and two teachers completed the Implementation Questionnaire and the principal completed the School Background Information Form.

The survey is phase 1 of a two phase study. Phase 2 will be devoted to visitations of the top three performing schools. These schools scored from one to two standard deviations above the mean on nearly all variables probed by the questionnaire. These visits will be targeted at determining what factors influenced their successful implementation of various changes at the local school level.

General Findings:

The following questions guided related data analyses:

1. Overall, how much are schools impacted by local school needs assessment studies and related implementation efforts?

The data suggest that there is a discrepancy between what staff members perceive the overall impact of their needs assessment process to be and what areas are actually impacted. Graph A displays the performance reported overall and by categories of

content, organization, etc. As can be observed, staff rate an overall performance that approximates its full potential. However, an examination of other categories, a greater gap is observed between possible performance (PossMean) and actual performance (Mean). Lags are very evident in the areas of content, instructional materials, instructional situations, problems, and policy. Some moderate success is reported for the areas of organization and goals. The data suggest that there were some school level changes but few classroom level changes. The data concerning goal performance suggests a "moderate positive effect."

2. In what areas (e.g.; content, organization, teaching activities, instructional materials, instructional situations, goals, problems, and policy) do the top performing schools differ from the other schools?

As would be expected, the top performing schools (Top Six) reported greater overall performance in nearly all categories except instructional situations. Graph B illustrates these comparisons with the areas of content, organization, activity, and to a lesser degree policy, reflecting a higher degree of performance.

3. Do principals and teachers differ in their perceptions about the degree to which the school was impacted by the needs assessment study and related improvement efforts?

As illustrated in Graph C, there is across the board agreement on the degree to which the various areas were impacted. The only exception to this pattern was the area of instructional materials with the principals (PrncpalMean) perceiving a higher degree of impact than the teachers (TcherMean).

4. Are there differences in performance between schools that used different approaches to their needs assessment process (e.g.; regional accreditation, systems management, and effective schools)?

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions were used: accreditation involves gathering performance information within the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) and regional accreditation guidelines, systems management involves a discrepancy analysis based on a predetermined list of goal statements (desired performance) and perceived (actual) performance, and effective schools involves the utilization of the effective schools characteristics for data gathering and analysis for determining areas in need of improvement.

Overall, there are only slight differences in performance regardless of the needs assessment approach used. As is shown in Graph D, there are some differences in the areas of organization

and policy. In the area of organization, systems management and effective schools approaches had greater impact than the accreditation approach. In regards to policy, systems management reflects more impact than the other two approaches. There are some hints of differences between the approaches in the perception of overall impact, content, teaching activities, and instructional materials.

Implications:

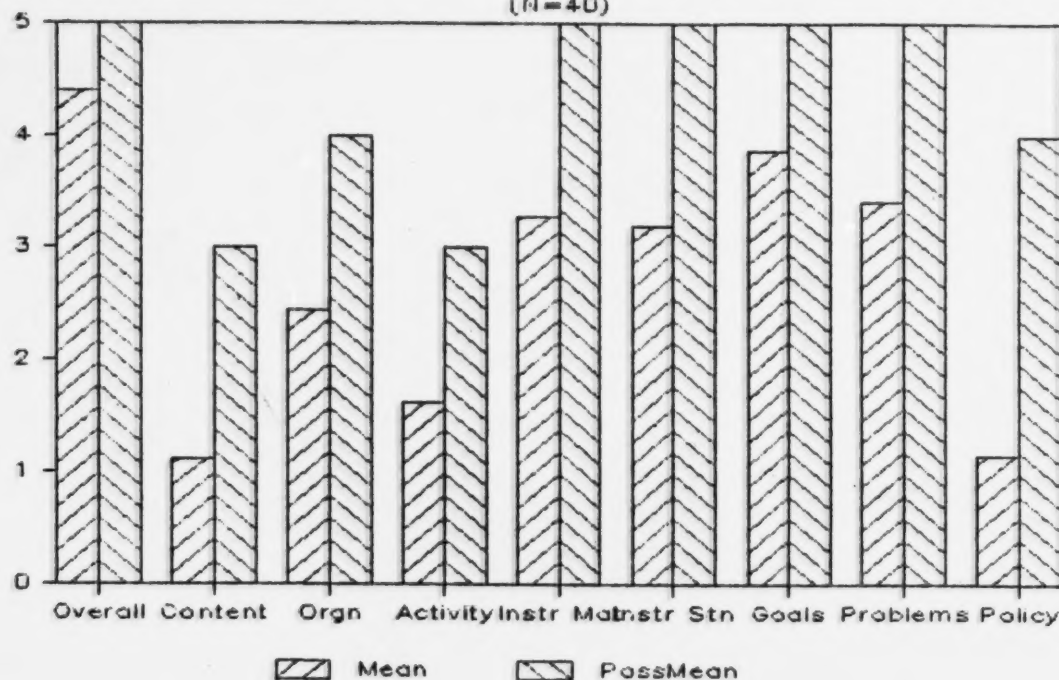
Given the exploratory nature of this study and small sample size, the drawing of inferences is limited. The data did surface a subset of schools that stood out as high performers and has served well in providing schools worthy of closer scrutiny.

The discrepancy of perceived overall impact of the respective needs assessment efforts and the perceived specific areas of impact suggests the need of further analysis. The significant lags in the areas of content, instructional materials, instructional situations, problems, and policy merit further thinking. It is recognized that the degree of change is relative to the potential for change. That is to say, personnel in schools who judge their performance at an acceptable level are less likely to report little or moderate impact of subsequent improvement efforts. Further analyses will be conducted of the data reported by these schools. However, these lags do beg the question as to the motivating forces to engage in a comprehensive needs assessment process and how relevant was the approach that was followed.

A

IMPLEMENTATION PERFORMANCE SCORES

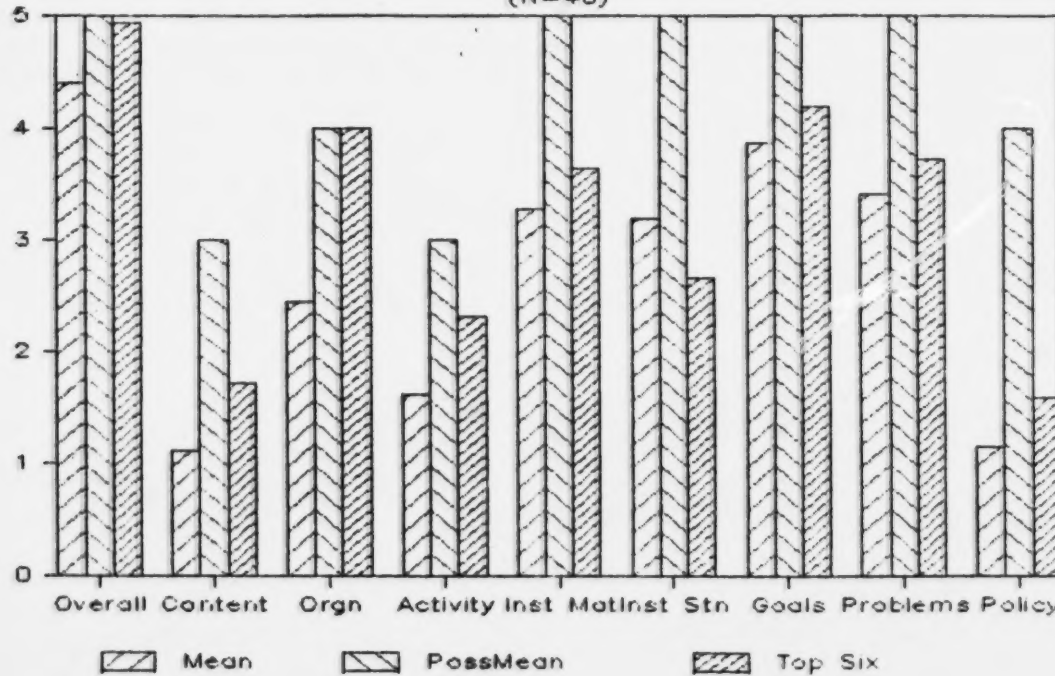
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B

IMPLEMENTATION PERFORMANCE SCORES

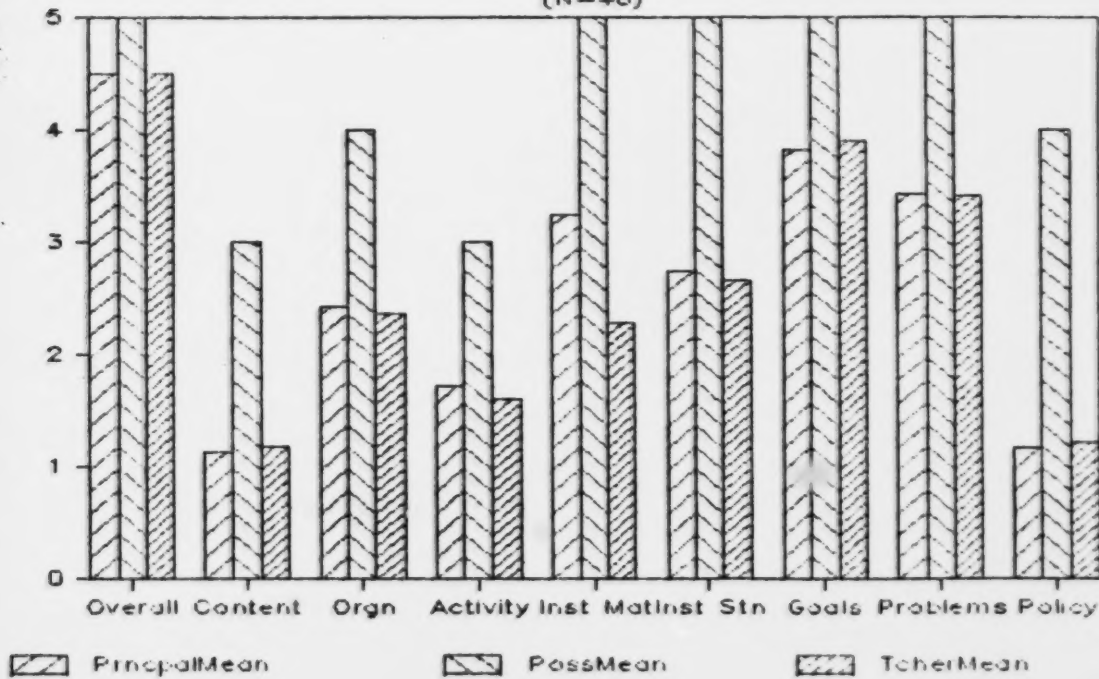
(N=40)



C

IMPLEMENTATION PERFORMANCE SCORES

(N=40)



D

IMPLEMENTATION PERFORMANCE SCORES

(N=40)

